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AFTERMATH OF AUGUST 23, 2011 EARTHQUAKE AT AFRH

Armed Forces Retirement Home, Washington, DC- On Tuesday, August 23, 2011, at approximately 1:50 pm, as residents and staff of the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) went about their daily activities, a 5.8 magnitude earthquake shook the grounds and buildings at the historic Washington, DC campus.

The hardest hit building was the 1850s era Sherman Building, home to the AFRH, resident activities spaces and dining services, and The William E. Doar Jr. Public Charter School for the Performing Arts (WEDJ), a DC Charter School (www.wedjschool.us). All residents, staff, and school children and staff were quickly and safely evacuated with no reported injuries.

Damage also occurred in the Sheridan Dormitory (built in 1972 and renovated in 2001), home to all Independent Living residents. Three of the five elevators were compromised when the weights inside shifted during the quake, leaving only two elevators operational.

Justin Seffens, AFRH Facilities Manager, is currently working with structural engineers to shore up damaged areas in the Sherman Building. Several large stone blocks that form the crenellation around the building crashed inward through the roof into classrooms and offices and outward onto the ground. Right now, there are numerous pieces of stone that did not fall but are holding on by a thread around the parapet. This is the same condition for the chimney stacks at the historic living Quarters 1 and 2, although there is much less damage to those structures.

Other than the falling stone blocks, the main issue right now is the tower of the Sherman South. There are major cracks through the arches and around one of the corners of the tower, and the structure is visibly leaning to the west. Engineers and masonry experts are on site trying to assess the situation, but the general consensus is that the structure has been severely compromised and that there is a possibility of immediate failure.

The North Sherman was occupied by Dining services, the Artists' colony, the DC Charter School, and AFRH Security. The school has been notified that it will be at least six weeks before they might be allowed to re-occupy their areas.

Because of the possibility of high winds and rain coming with Hurricane Irene, the Sherman will be stabilized over a 48 hour period to prevent additional damage. The most unstable section is Sherman South due to the compromised Clock Tower. The old Scott Building across the quadrangle is under reconstruction by the design-build construction company, Hensel Phelps. They are helping out by bringing in multiple cranes and other pieces of heavy machinery with a work crew of 32 men. They are going to "strap" the Sherman building with special 12 inch tall fabric bands to attempt to prevent more of the Tower falling. When banded, they will begin to dismantle stone from the highest points and down that will later be re-installed.

The key focus throughout the last two days has been the safety and comfort of the residents. Dining Services was relocated to the Fitness Center in the Sheridan dormitory and is fully operational. Residents have had no interruption in services: dining, healthcare, or activities. Corporate staff which was housed in the Sherman South will be relocated into other buildings not damaged.

Fondly known by neighbors and DC residents as the "Old Soldiers' Home", the AFRH is home to 600 former enlisted military and hosts the Lincoln Cottage. The campus is 272 acres with a golf course. It is recognized as having a national level of historic significance because of the important role it has played in US military history, as well as its history of politics, medicine, agriculture, landscape, and architecture. About 102 historic buildings, structures, and objects, dating from 1842 to 1944, are located here, along with several historically significant landscape features.

The AFRH-Washington is a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places and the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic sites. The Lincoln Cottage and the three original masonry buildings constructed in 1854 were all designated as a single National Historic Landmark in 1979. And, in 2000, President William Clinton dedicated a section of the campus as the President Lincoln's Cottage National Monument.

The Sherman Building, however, is located within the Soldiers' Home National Historic Landmark – one of four buildings with a "Key" level of historic significance. Since 2004, the Sherman has housed the main administrative offices of the AFRH. The Sherman Building is a visual landmark of AFRH-W from points throughout Washington.

For more information about AFRH and to see photos of earthquake damages, go to www.afrh.gov.